

An Approach to the Study
of
THE SECRET DOCTRINE

By JOY MILLS



THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY IN AMERICA
OLCOTT — WHEATON, ILLINOIS

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PREFACE

There is surely no more thrilling adventure for the human spirit than to immerse oneself in the mysterious depths of TRUTH. The UNKNOWN has always held a strange fascination for man. The early Greeks, looking out upon the Aegean Sea, sought to understand the nature of their world: the ultimate essence was described in terms of water, of air, of fire, of earth, of motion. The strange enigma of the Sphinx, the cryptic utterance of the Delphic Oracle, "Know thyself," the inscription of Paul, "To the UNKNOWN GOD," the search of the medieval alchemists for the elixir that would transmute baser metal into gold, the quest for the fountain of eternal youth, all are expressions of man's inmost desire to fathom the Unfathomable, to know the Unknowable, to discern one more white light on the road that leads to TRUTH itself.

Within each, there is an eternal Socrates, forever asking "Why?" We look with wonder at the sky, at the majestic forms of trees, at the perfect beauty of the crystal or the snowflake, at the smallest blade of grass; within the eyes of the Beloved, we read the mysteries of LOVE and long to know more intimately His secret heart. The beckoning finger of the OCCULT forever leads us on into strange, new lands of knowledge.

Though the mind cannot at first grasp the fulness of the Esoteric Philosophy, the heart still answers, "I know." The reason is cautious in venturing forth, but the intuition darts like the quick tongue of the serpent, always the symbol of Eternal Wisdom, and understands the synthesis of knowledge the intellect cannot sustain. Within the inner recesses of every being's heart lies the only true Educator: The Immortal Self. Though we doubt and shout abroad our ignorance and insufficiency, a voice within still leads us on.

Millenia hence we may fully understand the full import and significance of these majestic lines: "The Eternal Parent, wrapped in her ever-invisible robes, had slumbered once again for seven eternities. . . Time was not, for it lay asleep in the infinite bosom of Duration." What a cosmic rhythm pulses through the lines: "Where was Silence? Where the ears to sense it? No! There was neither Silence nor Sound; naught save ceaseless Eternal Breath, which knows itself not." What drama unfolds before our eyes as we read: "Father-Mother spin a web, whose upper end is fastened to Spirit, the Light of the one Darkness, and the lower one to its shadowy end, Matter; and this Web is the Universe spun out of the two substances made in one, which is Svabhavat."

In every age man has penetrated further, carried the light of growing knowledge deeper into the darkness of his own ignorance. But in 1888 there burst upon the world the pure white light of TRUTH such as modern man had never seen. All that could then be given to an "orphan Humanity" of the Esoteric Philosophy was recorded by Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky in *The Secret Doctrine*. That book, dedicated "to

ALL TRUE THEOSOPHISTS IN EVERY COUNTRY AND OF EVERY RACE FOR THEY CALLED IT FORTH AND FOR THEM IT WAS RECORDED," brings back to thirsting man the memories of his greatness and draws him on to even higher achievements. Its dynamic and rhythmic words thunder like a huge triumphant army marching across the arid wastes of materialism through the limiting fields of the intellect to camp in the peaceful and friendly expanses of the intuition.

Let us approach with reverence and humility these volumes that need a century for their understanding. But by all means let us approach! Though intellect rebel and reason doubt, read on until the cosmic drama and the pilgrimage of Man across the stage of life resound throughout your being, until every atom thrills with vibrant actualities of the future, until all things glow with the Divine! The Doctrine is open to all; let all approach. To have bathed even for a little while in the waters of knowledge, in the ocean of the Ancient Wisdom, is to live renewed.

INTRODUCTION

In approaching *The Secret Doctrine*, by H. P. Blavatsky, it is important to know *how* to study, rather than *what* to study, for the mass of data is so great, the wealth of interpretation so profound, that the student feels at once the need for a guide through the forest paths. The volumes have been sub-titled "The Synthesis of Science, Religion and Philosophy." The man of today has been educated to analyze, rather than to synthesize his facts. His entire mental approach to the nature of himself and the world about him is in terms of segments of knowledge, not in terms of wholes. Therefore, *The Secret Doctrine* demands a new method of approach. Here is a synthesis, not an analysis; the average man is faced with what seems a confusion; logic is dethroned; order seems nowhere present. How are we to understand that for which we have no prepared intellectual apparatus? How are we to interpret statements to which our brain mechanisms make no recognized response? Throughout her work, Madame Blavatsky has left innumerable hints and subtle clues for the reader. Again and again she reiterates the method of approach, the value of certain knowledge, the uselessness of other fragments of learning.

In *Reminiscences of H. P. Blavatsky and "The Secret Doctrine,"* by Countess Constance Wachtmeister and others, Bertram Keightley states: ". . . When studied thoroughly but not treated as a revelation, when understood and assimilated but not made a test for dogma, H. P. B.'s *Secret Doctrine* will be found of incalculable value, and will furnish suggestions, clues, and threads for guidance, for the study of nature and man, such as no other existing work can supply."

The following outline, compiled from H. P. B.'s own statements regarding the method of studying *The Secret Doctrine*, is presented in the hope that the student will find it useful to know how best he may prepare himself to enter the Domain of Truth. It is meant to aid the beginning student especially in comprehending the nature and content of the volumes and in preparing himself for the deeper and fuller study of the Esoteric Philosophy. After this preliminary preparation, the student will wish to select some plan of procedure, either to read sequentially through the volumes or to investigate particular topics. To facilitate this, a list of interpretative texts, each suggesting certain study plans, is herein given. However, the present outline is meant to suggest that a reading of *The Secret Doctrine* in the order of the topical headings of the following section, "What is *The Secret Doctrine*?" will lead to a comprehensive understanding, as well as a full appreciation of the Ancient Wisdom.

[All references given in the outline are to the fourth (Adyar) edition, (six volumes). For paging in the 1888 edition as well as the third edition, see *Concordance to the Four Copyright Editions*, prepared at Adyar by Arya Asanga, and obtainable through The Theosophical Press, Wheaton, Illinois.]

An Approach to the Study

.. of ..

THE SECRET DOCTRINE

I. What Is The Secret Doctrine?

A. How and why was it written?

Dedication: "To all true Theosophists in every country and of every race for they called it forth and for them it was recorded."

"In *Isis Unveiled* all that could be stated . . . was set down in the guise of hints . . . But hints may now grow into explanations." (Vol. V, p. 42)

See: *Reminiscences of H. P. Blavatsky and "The Secret Doctrine,"* by Countess Constance Wachtmeister and others, *Reminiscences of H. P. Blavatsky*, by Bertram Keightley.

Sources of *The Secret Doctrine*: see "Introductory." Read carefully and discuss: "The Secret Doctrine was the universally diffused religion of the ancient and prehistoric world." (Vol. 1, p. 56)

B. Three fundamental propositions

See Vol. 1, pp. 79-85; p. 313, et. seq. Establish clearly in mind the basis upon which *The Secret Doctrine* is founded. "No matter what one may study in *The Secret Doctrine*, let the mind hold fast as the basis of its ideation to" the three basic truths: "The Fundamental Unity of all Existence. There is no dead matter. Man is the Microcosm." (H. P. B. to a group of students.)

C. Cosmogogenesis

Seven Stanzas from the *Book of Dzryan*.

Commentary

Evolution of symbolism (Vol. 2)

"Archaic Axioms . . . placed side by side with modern Hypotheses." (Vol. 2, p. 202)

"History of cosmic evolution traced in Stanzas is abstract algebraic formula for that evolution . . . not an account of all its stages

and transformations . . . formula can be applied to all evolution . . ."
(*Abridgment of The Secret Doctrine*, by Katharine Hillard.)

D. Anthropogenesis (Vols. 3 and 4)

Twelve stanzas from the *Book of Dzyan* with Commentary.
Three propositions regarding the evolution of man (Vol. 3, p. 15 ff.)
Science and Theology (Vol. 4, parts 2 and 3)

Note: Conclusion, Vol. 4, pp. 362 et seq. ". . . detailed cosmogony and the evolution of the four Races that preceded our Fifth-Race Humanity are given" (Vol. 1, p. 63). . . "the various religious schemes are now made to merge back into their original element, out of which every mystery and dogma has grown, developed, and become materialized" (Vol. 1, p. 8) . . . "We have concerned ourselves with the ancient records of the nations, with the doctrine of chronological and psychic cycles, of which these records are tangible proof. . ." (Vol. 4, p. 362)

E. Addenda (Vol. 5)

Vol. 3 of 1897 edition, Vol. 5 of Adyar edition, consists of papers given to Annie Besant by H. P. B., together with E. S. T. material originally given by H. P. B. to her students, now allowed to be published. Note preface carefully: some misconceptions have arisen in regard to this final volume, and the material it contains needs to be understood in context.

Remembering the scheme of *The Secret Doctrine* as outlined by H. P. B., what merit does this final section have in the total plan? Values it contributes?

F. Summary: "*The Secret Doctrine*, as published in 1888, was an epitome of the religious and philosophical teachings underlying the various ancient systems of religion (though necessarily fragmentary and incomplete), and had for its aim (1) to show that Nature is *not* 'a fortuitous concourse of atoms'; (2) to assign man his rightful place in the universe; (3) to rescue from degradation the archaic truths which are the foundation-stones of all religious systems; and finally (4) to show that modern science knows nothing of the occult side of nature." (*Abridgment of The Secret Doctrine*, by Hillard, p. 9)

H. P. B.: "What is contained in this work is to be found scattered throughout thousands of volumes embodying the Scriptures of the great Asiatic and early European religions, hidden under glyph and symbol, and hitherto left unnoticed because of this veil. What is now attempted is to gather these oldest tenets together, and to make of them one harmonious and unbroken whole." (Vol. 1, pp. 7-8)

"... a few fundamental truths ... from the Secret Doctrine of the Archaic Ages" (Vol. 1, p. 45)

"... *The Secret Doctrine* is not a treatise, or a series of vague theories, but contains all that can be given out to the world in this century" (Vol. 1, p. 60)

"... I have here made only a nosegay of culled flowers, and have brought nothing of my own but the string that ties them" (Vol. 1, p. 67)

"... The writer can ... give but what she has herself been taught, and no more, and even this will appear to the profane reader rather as a weird, fantastic dream, than as a possible reality" (Vol. 3, p. 435)

"... It confronts the purely speculative hypotheses of Modern Science, based upon the experience and exact observations of barely a few centuries, with the unbroken tradition and records of its Sanctuaries ... " (Vol. 3, p. 441)

"... But our explanations are by no means complete, nor do they pretend to give out the full text, or to have been read by the help of more than three or four keys out of the sevenfold bunch of Esoteric interpretation; and even this has only been partially accomplished. . . Our main concern has been simply to prepare the soil" (Vol. 4, p. 365)

"... (these volumes) constitute the work of a Pioneer who has forced his way into the well-nigh impenetrable jungle of the virgin forests of the Land of the Occult" (Vol. 4, p. 366)

"... Not that any claim to infallibility, or to perfect correctness in every detail of all which is herein written, has ever been put forward" (Vol. 1, p. 315)

"... The writer is vividly alive to the tremendous difficulties that present themselves in the handling of such abstruse questions, and to all the dangers of the task" (Vol. 5, p. 44)

II. *Methods of Approach*

A. Attitude of student

Mental set, or pattern, previously established must be exchanged for fluidic mental pattern.

"... the daring explorer ... must transcend the narrow limitations of sense and transfer his consciousness into the region of Noumena and the sphere of Primal Causes." (Vol. 2, p. 200)

"One must not be a fool and drive oneself into the madhouse by attempting too much at first. The brain is the instrument of waking consciousness, and every conscious mental picture formed means change and destruction of the atoms of the brain. Ordinary intellec-

tual activity moves on well-beaten paths in the brain, and does not compel sudden adjustments and destructions in its substance. But this new kind of mental effort calls for something very different—the carving out of new 'brain paths,' the ranking in different order of the little brain lives . . . And so the process goes on, *until at last the mind and its pictures are transcended and the learner enters and dwells in the world of no form, but of which all forms are narrowed reflections.* The true student of *The Secret Doctrine* is a Jnana Yogi, and this Path of Yoga is the true path for the western student. It is to provide him with signposts on that path that *The Secret Doctrine* has been written."

[Mr. Robert Bowen's Notes on H. P. B.'s suggestions, reprinted in *The American Theosophist*, October and November 1936, "Madame Blavatsky's Own Ideas About Study of *The Secret Doctrine*" by Pieter K. Roest.]

Mind must be stilled:

"It must be left to the intuition and the higher faculties of the reader to grasp, as far as he can, the meaning of the allegorical phrases used. . . all these Stanzas appeal to the inner faculties rather than to the ordinary comprehension of the physical brain." (Vol. 1, p. 86) ". . . since this work withholds far more than it gives out, the student is invited to use his own intuition" (Vol. 1, p. 321).

Practice of meditation is helpful in raising consciousness from mental to intuitional level.

This should precede each period of study. The mind should be "equilibrated by intuition and a natural spirituality" (Vol. 2, p. 203).

Note ". . . the contrast between the laboriously acquire knowledge of the senses and mind (manas), and the intuitive omniscience of the Spiritual Divine Soul (Buddhi)." (Vol. 1, p. 322).

The student should literally "fall in love" with the work, for as H. P. B. states, an understanding of *The Secret Doctrine* ". . . requires a boundless love of truth and the surrender of that prestige . . . of infallibility . . . requires first of all the abandonment of the actual materialistic lines." (Vol. 2, p. 245).

Self-development should accompany study.

"Nor, after all, is it necessary that any one should believe in the Occult Sciences and the Old Teachings, before he knows anything of, or even believes in his own soul." (Vol. 3, p. 439).

B. Examination of inductive sciences. Correlations. Use of empirical approach.

"There can be no possible conflict between the teachings of Occult and so-called exact Science . . ." (Vol. 2, p. 189).

In so far as possible, students may correlate statements in *The Secret Doctrine* with those now made by the inductive sciences. Note particularly advancements now made in physics (electricity, etc.). "The present volumes . . . show in an anticipatory answer to several of the forthcoming Scientific objections . . . the latter have then, to be examined . . ." (Vol. 1, p. 338).

Different approach to Stanzas and to Commentaries: cannot test experimentally the Stanzas; in some instances, we may test the Commentaries. In how far can this empirical method be extended?

"These (archaic Genesis and History) must be accepted or rejected on their own merits, fully or partially; but not before they have been carefully compared with the corresponding theological dogmas and the modern scientific theories and speculations . . ." (Vol. 4, p. 15).

"Judge the statements made from the standpoint of his own knowledge, experience, and consciousness . . ." (Vol. 1, p. 67).

May empirical approach include experiences based on inner perceptions of student?

C. Summary:

"Shall one, for fear of incurring the penalty of being called a superstitious fool, or even a liar, abstain from furnishing proofs—as good as any existent—only because that day, when all the SEVEN KEYS shall be delivered unto Science . . . has not yet dawned?" (Vol. 2, p. 35).

What is the nature of these proofs? In how far are they now accepted?

"Therefore, the rejection of these teachings may be expected, and must be expected beforehand. No one styling himself a 'scholar' in whatever department of exact Science, will permit himself to regard these teachings seriously. They will be derided and rejected *a priori* in this century (19th), but only in this one. For in the Twentieth Century of our era scholars will begin to recognize that the SECRET DOCTRINE has neither been invented nor exaggerated, but, on the contrary, simply outlined. . . ." (Vol. 1, p. 59).

D. Suggestions by later students:

"Though *The Secret Doctrine* gives us the most hidden teachings that the world can know, yet they are still hidden. It is only after years of effort, study, and self-development that one can discover some part of the actuality that lies behind these marvelous explanations of the mysteries of life." (*Studies in The Secret Doctrine*, by Josephine Ransom, p. 10).

"The distinctive difference between modern and occult Science lies in the first place in the point of view from which the whole question of *phenomenon* or *objectivity* is approached, and in the second place in the methods of investigation which are employed. . . . Modern science approaches questions from below Occult science. . . from above." (*The Physics of The Secret Doctrine*, by William Kingsland. Preface v.)

III. Aids to Study

A. Notebook of terms

It has been found helpful by many students to keep readily at hand a small loose-leaf notebook, arranged alphabetically, in which terms are noted based on the Glossary (Vol. 6), with comments from discussion and thought upon the respective subjects.

Cross-references may also be noted in a small notebook, based on the Index (Vol. 6), as well as any further references found throughout the study. Such a notebook may include references to subjects from other sources.

B. Reference works: Use and Value

Certain texts by later writers, based on *The Secret Doctrine* have been found helpful in further elucidating the material given by H. P. B. They should be studied, not as independent from the main work, but as auxiliaries to it. References to particular topics, as noted in the notebook of terms, should be made and discussed.

For convenience, the major references are noted here and brief statements, often in the form of excerpts, appended to facilitate the study:

1. *An Abridgment of The Secret Doctrine*, by Katharine Hillard.

" . . . to trace the thread of the argument. . . cutting away of what is now obsolete science, and of all controversial matter (while carefully retaining all ethical and spiritual teachings) . . . Sanskrit terms have been put into English, and the triune constitution of man (as body, soul and spirit) adopted wherever possible instead of the more complicated sevenfold division . . . prove a guide and stimulus to the study of the original work."

This book is especially helpful to beginning students to obtain a clear, consecutive picture of the two parts: Cosmogogenesis and Anthropogenesis.

2. *Transactions of the Blavatsky Lodge of The Theosophical Society*. (Discussions on the Stanzas of the First Volume of *The Secret Doctrine*).

"Compiled from shorthand notes taken at meetings . . . from January 10th to June 20th, 1889. . . questions put by members who. . . supported their objections and exceptions on modern scientific grounds. . . answers in all cases. . . are those of Esoteric Philosophy as given by H. P. B. herself. . . priceless commentary at first hand on some of the most abstruse and difficult problems of the Esoteric Philosophy."

3. *Scientific Corroborations of Theosophy*, by Dr. A. Marques. (A Vindication of *The Secret Doctrine* by the latest Discoveries.)

Covers fields of: Chemistry, Physiology, Astronomy, Physics, Geology, Palaeontology, Archaeology, Philology, and Anthropology.

4. *The Physics of The Secret Doctrine*, by William Kingsland.

". . . to elucidate clearly the modern scientific views as to the nature of Matter and Energy. . . then pass on to the Occult teachings, dealing first of all with the general question as to the nature of phenomena and their Root in Primordial Substance, and afterwards with some special phenomena such as heat, light, sound, electricity, etc."

5. *Alchemy and The Secret Doctrine*, compiled by Alexander Horne.

"To us, alchemy in its esoteric aspect is but occult chemistry—wedded often to occult metaphysics. . . it is with the view of presenting. . . the views of higher occultism with respect to the constitution of the universe, that this work has been prepared."

This book is especially helpful in understanding the correlations between science and *The Secret Doctrine*, with regard to such topics as Akasha, Fire, the Atom, etc.

6. *Notes of The Secret Doctrine*, by Maude Lambert-Taylor.

Gives outline of subjects suggested for study. Deals with statements of modern science in relation to occult science.

7. *Studies in The Secret Doctrine*, by Josephine Ransom.

Directs itself to "some aspects of the cycle of Involution and Evolution."

Treats specifically of: The Dhyan-Chohans, The Three Vestures (Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya, and Nirmanakaya), The Divine Five (Dhyani-Buddhas: Vairochana, Akshobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitabha, and Amogha Siddhi), Fohat, and the Monad.

(These works give suggestions for the study of *The Secret Doctrine*, and the student may select that guide which most appeals to his

temperament and reason, after having prepared himself by means of this suggested approach to understand the volumes themselves.)

IV. *Application and Value*

A. Applied to individual living.

The study of any work is of little permanent value unless its teachings are applied in daily living, and the study bears fruit in its application to everyday situations and occasions.

"... these subjects are very practical matters, each on its own level. There is a practicality of the art of dealing with ourselves. Do not try to make that practicality fit only into the physical world, essential though that is. It is true of all worlds. Let us try to comprehend something of the inner worlds, of the operations of those worlds as suggested in *The Secret Doctrine*. Thus will we comprehend something of the stupendous inner values of the universe, for there the Monad is at work in its own realm. Let us try to realize something of that vast universal consciousness, of splendid universal designs. The Monad is to be at home everywhere, in the small as in the great, and for that purpose its vehicles must surely be completely evolved and trained to serve it—for this seems to be the ideal: perfect efficiency without, that there may be utter freedom or Self-expression from within." (*Studies in The Secret Doctrine*, by Josephine Ransom, pp. 171-172)

B. Value found in bringing one's own knowledge to the aid of others. "It is written in the service of humanity. . ." (Vol. 1, p. 8.) It should therefore be studied in the service of humanity.

"The value of the teachings of the *Secret Doctrine* rests essentially on the following points:

(a) the logical completeness, sequence, and intelligibility of its scheme of the world, in all its sub-divisions;

(b) the assertion of the original unity of matter and of its evolution into atomic constitution through Divine vibrations, all built in the basic matter being the result of temporary differences in vibration and position (see S. D. 1, 491);

(c) the assumption of life eternal and of constant evolution or becoming, everywhere, under the guidance of intelligent forces;

(d) in man, the union of spirit and matter."

(*Scientific Corroborations of Theosophy*, by Dr. A. Marques, p. 146.)

Translate these values into terms of daily living, note applications with reference to increased awareness of inner worlds, ability to share knowledge with others, etc.

CONCLUSION

H. P. B. summarized her purpose as: "The aim of this work may be thus stated: . . . to assign to man his rightful place in the scheme of the Universe. . ." (Vol. 1, p. 8). The study of *The Secret Doctrine* should reveal this primary purpose, to the end that we may become better servers of our brothers in all kingdoms of nature and that we may prove ourselves worthy followers, successors of H. P. B. in transmitting the Light to the world of thought as we find it today.

Perhaps the time is not far distant when the final prophecy of *The Secret Doctrine* will be fulfilled: "In Century the Twentieth, some disciple more informed, and far better fitted, may be sent by the Masters of Wisdom to give final and irrefutable proofs that there exists a Science called Gupta Vidya; and that, like the once mysterious sources of the Nile, the source of all religions and philosophies now made known to the world has been for many ages forgotten and lost to men, but it is at last found." (Vol. 1, p. 60.)

It may not be outside the aim of this brief outline to ask, Will the conditional phrase "may be sent" depend upon the work we have done in understanding and spreading, believing and living, the truths already given to us through H. P. B.? *The Secret Doctrine*, it is said "gives life and regeneration to those who are fit to profit even by the little that is now revealed to them." (Vol. 1, p. 339.) The "fitting" of ourselves to the task is one sure method of approach; this alone will unlock for the student the magnitude of hidden treasure stored in the volumes of *The Secret Doctrine*.

